Need for Narrative

Tom van Laer *

Senior Lecturer in Marketing

Cass Business School, University of London

106 Bunhill Row, London EC1Y 8TZ, UK

Tel.: +44 20 7040 0324

E-mail address: tvanlaer@city.ac.uk

Luca M. Visconti

Professor of Marketing

ESCP Europe Business School

79, Avenue de la République, 75011 Paris, France

Tel.: +33 1 49 23 58 74

E-mail address: lvisconti@escpeurope.eu

Stephanie Feiereisen

Senior Lecturer in Marketing

Cass Business School, University of London

106 Bunhill Row, London EC1Y 8TZ, UK

Tel.: +44 20 70 40 09 13

E-mail address: Stephanie.Feiereisen.1@city.ac.uk

* Corresponding author

About the authors

Tom van Laer is Senior Lecturer in Marketing at Cass Business School, University of London, UK. He studies storytelling, social media, and trust. His research is published in premier and leading academic journals, including the *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Journal of Management Information Systems*, *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, et cetera. Previously, he was Assistant Professor at ESCP Europe Business School and a visiting scholar at the Universities of Sydney and New South Wales in Australia. He holds a doctorate in marketing (PhD) from Maastricht University, the Netherlands.

Luca M. Visconti is Professor of Marketing at ESCP Europe, Paris campus, France. He holds a doctorate in Business Administration and Management from Università Bocconi, Milan. His research involves the boundaries between individual and shared ownership, brand storytelling, and vulnerable consumers' consumption. His research has appeared in *Marketing Theory*, *Journal of Consumer Behavior*, *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Journal of Macromarketing*, *Journal of Marketing Management*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Journal of Advertising*, *Industrial Marketing Management*, and *Consumption, Markets & Culture*. His latest edited book is *Marketing Management: A Cultural Perspective* (with L. Peñaloza and N. Toulouse).

Stephanie Feiereisen is Senior Lecturer in Marketing at Cass Business School, University of London, UK. Her research has appeared in *Journal of Product Innovation Management* and *Psychology & Marketing*. Stephanie's research interests include the marketing of radically new products, along with entertainment and media consumption. In addition, she has presented her research at several international conferences, including the Association of Consumer Research conference, the European Marketing Academy conference, and the

Consumer Culture Theory conference. She holds a doctorate in Marketing from Aston University, Birmingham, UK.

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Abstract

What do consumers need from a narrative? How can videographers satisfy those needs? Through semi-structured interviews with 55 Eurostar passengers from 14 countries, this film documents how people define narratives, why they need them, and how they experience the effects of need for narrative. The adjoining commentary contributes to the development of videography as an attractive method by introducing the videographer's perspective and elucidating key story elements that can help satisfy viewers' needs for narrative. The suggested approach maintains the vivid quality of videography and respects its methodological rigour, while increasing its effectiveness in close alignment with a consumer society that visual communication increasingly permeates. As such, the commentary and the film jointly unveil videographers' etic and viewers' emic use and evaluation of the videographic method.

Link: https://vimeo.com/91598490

Password: Need4Narrative

Keywords

Identifiable characters; imaginable plot; narrative transportation; storytelling; suspension of disbelief; videography

Summary statement of contribution

We provide two main contributions, which both lead to more effective videography. First, we take an emic perspective, focus on videography consumers, and identify five main types of need for narrative for which viewers may be looking. We argue that effective videography, which transports said viewers, will satisfy these needs. Second, we take an etic perspective, focus on filmmakers, and highlight four main story elements videographers can use in their films' creation to encourage an audience's narrative transportation. Combining emic and etic views on videography, our commentary and film help advance the field by adding methodological discussion and practical guidance on videography's story structure and effectiveness.

Travelling—it leaves you speechless, then turns you into a storyteller

—Ibn Baṭūṭah

Videography as narrative practice

Videography in marketing and consumer research not only expands data collection techniques but also provides a novel method to analyse, present, and convey research findings (Kozinets & Belk, 2006). As the call for papers to this special issue points out, videography facilitates narratives' diffusion in research thanks to its filmic output (Rokka, Hietanen, & Brownlie, 2016). Derived from ethnography, videography is the method of collecting, analysing, and disseminating audio-visual data for formative research (Belk & Kozinets, 2005, 2017). We restrict film to mean a videography's output: a camera-recorded set of moving images edited to tell a story (Bordwell, 2008). We define narrative as a viewer's consumption of the filmed story through which he or she does not just watch the film but also makes it 'viewable' in the first place (Van Laer, de Ruyter, Visconti, & Wetzels, 2014). In summary, through consumption a filmed story is converted into a narrative. This conversion from story into narrative facilitates (Green & Brock, 2000)(Green, Garst, & Brock, 2004)(Appel & Richter, 2007)the experience of entering the world that the narrative evokes, known as narrative transportation (Gerrig, 1993), which in turn leaves a profound effect on an audience.

We contend that films, because of their prevalent storytelling nature, should transport all parties that convert the story into a narrative. Films are the seeds of narratives. In the words of philosopher Žižek (2006), 'Cinema, as the art of appearances, tells us something about reality itself […] There is something real in the illusion, more real than in the reality behind it […] Our fundamental delusion today is not to believe in what is only a fiction, to

take fictions too seriously. It's, on the contrary, not to take fictions seriously enough.' Hietanen, Rokka, and Schouten (2014, p. 2021) acknowledge this cinematographic expressivity applies to videography, which they conceptualize as an 'active *encounter*' between the 'impressionistic video' and its audience.

Our purpose is to advance the field by elucidating key narrative needs from an emic perspective and elements that can help improve videography's effectiveness while respecting its methodological rigour from an etic perspective (Berry, 1989). First, we attend to videography's viewers to unpack consumers' tendency to emotionally engage in and enjoy films, that is, their 'need for narrative'. Except for Levy (2006), marketing research into consumers' need for narrative is scant. Therefore, our investigation sheds light on what viewers may be looking for beyond a videography's fantasy, a motivation that could blend story elements with viewers' lived experiences to create self-referential hyperauthenticity (Rose & Wood, 2005) and greater effects.

Second, we attend to videographers to illuminate how their practice can leverage viewers' narrative needs to evoke narrative transportation and thus ultimately lead to more effective videography. Relying on transportation theory (Green & Brock, 2000), we claim that videographers can make more effective videography when deploying the following four elements: (1) identifiable characters, (2) imaginable plot, (3) climax, and (4) key takeaway or moral.

To fulfil our purpose, we critically analyse the film this commentary accompanies. On the emic surface, the film documents how 55 Eurostar passengers distinguish between dissimilar needs for narrative. We present five motivations for narrative consumption: (1) understanding the outer world, (2) understanding the inner world, (3) investigating the outer world, (4) forgetting the inner world, and (5) looking after a lonely and suffering self. At a deeper level, the film shows how we-as-videographers used identifiable characters, an

imaginable plot, a climax, and a key takeaway to evoke narrative transportation. We derive implications for viewers and videographers from this deeper second, etic reading.

Viewers' needs for narrative on the emic plane

Viewers watching a film, process its narrative. Similar to Levy's (2006) comprehensive review, studies about online narratives document receivers' pro-activeness in (dis)liking, sharing, and producing narratives while consuming them, as broadly 'connected' consumers (Van Laer & De Ruyter, 2010). In the interpretivist tradition, we contend that viewers are not passive either. We address videography, and the position viewers occupy more specifically, using reader-response theory (Scott, 1994), a literary theory that focuses on readers' experience of literary works. We therefore recognize readers as active agents who impart real existence onto the films and complete their meaning through interpretation, in contrast with structuralism (Genette, 1980), formalism (Stern, 1988), and New Criticism (Davis & Schleifer, 1989) theories that propose that a text, such as a film, is an independent artefact.

The film this commentary accompanies identifies five needs for narrative that may facilitate people's indulgent narrative engrossment. In line with goal-directed strategic processing (Slater, 2002) and the uses and gratifications perspective on media consumption (Rubin, 1994), we contend that the more videography satisfies viewers' narrative needs, the greater is their narrative transportation. Our videography documents need for narrative regardless of domain (e.g., brand stories, McQuarrie & Mick, 1999), industry (Kretz, 2012), or product type (Chiu, Hsieh, & Kuo, 2012). Rather, interviewees freely provide their own emic definitions of narrative (00:48–03:21 in the film). Answers vary from biographies, books, documentaries, and films, to paintings and frescos, to music and novels. We identify

interviewees' various needs for narrative by connecting their favourite narrative repository with the gratification narrative content grants them. While the film provides additional details, we discuss the five most recurrent needs for narrative hereinafter.

Understanding the outer world (04:05–04:34)

A 56-year-old German woman (04:09–04:21) remarks that narratives can provide 'insight into other people's lives.' She concludes this is something all humans need. A 38-year-old Australian man (04:22–04:33) describes Ben Elton's novel *Two Brothers* as a means for anyone to understand interbellum Germany. Their vivid words account for the human daily practice of making sense of the world. Sensemaking combines reading (i.e., inscribed meanings' inspection) with authoring (i.e., personal meanings' attribution, Weick, 1995). Narratives strongly support people's hermeneutic processes because they provide 'key patterns of meaning' (Thompson, 1997, p. 438) from which people can derive broader implications. As existential phenomenologists Thompson, Pollio, and Locander (1989) posit, such a meaning abstraction process does not occur identically across individuals. Indeed, narrative interpretation crosses personal biography with culturally shared meanings attributed to that narrative (Thompson, Pollio, & Locander, 1994).

Understanding the inner world (04:34–05:00)

Psychologists document that living an event or feeling certain emotions does not necessarily make them easily interpretable. Researchers actually theorize imaginative, rational, and reflective meaning-making methods (Dirkx, 2001). For example, a 22-year-old Frenchman (04:38–04:53) prefers narratives to which he can more easily relate. Similarly, a 43-year-old American (04:54–04:59) admits he only enjoys narratives in which he has a personal stake. Psychology affirms people use narratives to make sense of personal experience through both

consumption of another's story (e.g., novels) and construction of autobiography. The latter is particularly useful to (1) purposefully interpret personal experience, (2) depict personal actions and intentions as appropriate, (3) increase self-efficacy, and (4) boost self-worth (Baumeister & Newman, 1994).

Investigating the outer world (05:00–05:37)

Different from needing to understand the outer world, needing to investigate it reflects the transcendence of people's direct experience. Here, narratives are meant not only to interpret what people feel or live through, as per existential hermeneutics (Thompson et al., 1989), but also to vicariously navigate other emotions and 'lives' by visiting real and fictional places people would not otherwise (Chronis, 2008).

Within literary studies, Rosenblatt (1938) constitutes the key reference for researchers interested in the interaction between readers and texts. She developed a transactional literary theory that rejects the idea that meaning is either in texts or in readers; rather, meaning emerges from the interaction of a reader with a text. Rosenblatt also presented narratives as personal events that become discoveries. In line with her predictions, our interviewees note their interest in documentaries to learn more about the world (05:04–05:15) and in novels, movies, or television series to expand their life experience (e.g., the *Twilight* saga; 05:16–05:37).

Forgetting the inner world (05:37–07:51)

Another shared need for narrative is to break away from daily life. Geographer Tuan (1998, p. xvi) comments, 'Escapism, I will argue, is human—and inescapable.' His work defines (the need for) escapism. While geographical and physical escapism produce immediately imaginable estrangement, narrative-provided cultural escapism is subtler and more profound,

as it entails escaping from nature generally and from our 'animality' (i.e., our natural body) particularly. As a 67-year-old British woman puts it (06:16–06:35), narratives are effective whenever 'I just don't want to think about my things anymore.' A 39-year-old French woman (06:52–08:26) reports avidly consuming horror films to avoid relapsing into alcohol abuse. Horror is an effective way to escape from her problems or, at least, to forget them for a while.

Tuan (1998, p. 151) warns that escapism can occur for 'heaven' (i.e., the good) and 'hell' (i.e., the bad). People may escape to reconnect with creativity, illumination, and imagination. Alternatively, they may escape to express indifference and to attain re-enchantment, both of which he considers frivolous motivations lacking moral weight. Our interviewees embody both situations. A 34-year-old Swedish woman admits she can invent narratives from music that grant elevation from mundane affairs (05:41–05:51). Conversely, the French woman who struggles with alcoholism suggests narratives suit solipsistic indulgence and denial of personal problems. As a 21-year-old French woman concludes (06:36–06:52), escapism is 'putting your issues aside and keeping them for later, as a result, they do not get resolved.'

Looking after a lonely and suffering self (07:51–11:58)

Escapism allows forgetting the inner self, which does not resolve people's problems. At other times, individuals seem to consume narratives to improve personal resources and heal their suffering selves. Clinicians have fiercely debated narrative therapy. Dwivedi (1997) documents (1) powerful narratives used for clinical aims, (2) their cultural embeddedness in alternative socio-cultural spaces, and (3) their therapeutic use for different patients (e.g., children, families, older adults). Van Laer (2014) and Frank (1995) recount that narratives of, respectively, cyberbullying and illness are more than accounts of personal suffering: they abound with moral choices and stress a social ethic. Bhattacharyya (1997) shows that

narratives are often built on or from myths, which are powerful meaning providers (Lévi-Strauss, 1979) because they include historical elements, linguistic cues to a given culture, religious and ritual values, and social norms and structure. According to Bhattacharyya (1979, p. 3), 'It would seem myths perform a similar role to the section of a tree trunk telling the history of the tree.' This may at least partly account for narratives' appeal to a suffering self.

Our videography captures narratives' various therapeutic uses, ranging from a 37-year-old Argentinian man coping with his loneliness after migration through narratives (09:06–09:27) to a 19-year-old British woman insisting narratives offer a 'fictional revenge' (09:41–09:58). An 80-year-old Irish woman is particularly telling of how she uses a specific narrative to treat her suffering self. She remembers when she was younger and her mother had just passed away (10:30–11:58). Retrospectively, she can still recall her various emotions, including profound sorrow, embarrassment over her unkempt appearance in front of people visiting her, and guilt for being vain instead of purely mourning her loss. With eyes brimming with tears, she acknowledges reading Charles Dickens's (1850) *The Personal History, Adventures, Experience and Observation of David Copperfield the Younger of Blunderstone Rookery (Which He Never Meant to Publish on Any Account).* She presents David Copperfield as her alter ego, whose similar life events and emotions make her realise she is 'not to blame.'

Videographers' use of essential story elements on the etic plane

If videographers exploit story elements that increase an audience's narrative transportation, videography's increased effectiveness can advance the field. The four elements

that narrative transportation research (Gerrig, 1993; Green & Brock, 2000; Van Laer et al., 2014) suggests as crucial are (1) identifiable characters, (2) imaginable plot, (3) climax, and (4) key takeaway or moral. We next discuss these and tie them to our videography's second reading to unveil how and to what extent we use them in our own work. As such, we retrospectively and introspectively assess our videography (Minowa, Visconti, & MacLaran, 2012).

Identifiable characters

A first story element increasing viewers' narrative transportation is identifiable characters (Escalas & Stern, 2003), that is, clearly pinpointed personas with whom viewers can easily identify. Scholars highlight two main features that improve characters' identifiability (Feldman, Bruner, Renderer, & Spitzer, 2014): (1) landscapes of affective consciousness (clarifying what characters feel in the story) and (2) landscapes of cognitive consciousness (representing characters' internal thoughts). If videographers can increase characters' identifiability, viewers will be more transportable from the deeper insights they glean into characters' emotions and thoughts.

Our videography presents two sources for character identifiability. First, some interviewees became main characters in the film. For example, the 80-year old Irish woman who commemorates her mother's death (10:30–11:58) is a fully shaped character. Her life-story approach to the interview (Atkinson, 1998) grants continuity between the girl she was and the woman she has become and thus broadens viewers' spectrum for identification. Viewers can also quite easily empathize with the 39-year-old French woman (06:52–08:26) who self-prescribes horror films to overcome her alcohol addiction. These interviewees are main characters not only for their greater screen time but also for the content they share: vibrantly presented accounts that resonate emotionally. Limiting the use of main characters is

possible but arguably not desirable. In his dedication to ethnographic account-writing, Goodall (2000, p. 11) comments on the dichotomy researchers face in writing a 'monologue' versus a 'dialogue'. The more they wish to make videography dialogical, the more they need main characters.

Second, at the film's end (19:24–20:22), we couple key takeaways with characters emblematically embodying them. On the one hand, verbal (i.e., overwritten takeaways) and visual (i.e., characters' faces) elements should ameliorate memorization (Baddeley, 1992). On the other hand, this expedient should facilitate viewers' identification, and ultimately narrative transportation, by providing them with both rational and emotional stimuli (Ambler, Ioannides, & Rose, 2000). Prior work shows consumers respond in this manner to visual elements in advertising (Scott, 1994; Scott & Vargas, 2007), media (Russell & Schau, 2014), and deep experiences (Van Laer et al., 2014).

Imaginable plot

An imaginable plot is an event sequence to which viewers can relate from some crucial story chain properties: temporal embedding, spatial embedding, intertextuality, and verisimilitude. Temporal embedding contains cause–effect event construction, which gives stories direction (Escalas, 1998; Thompson, 1997). Spatial embedding implies using extensive illustrations from a circumstantiated world to increase stories' concreteness (Gerrig, 1993). Intertextuality involves bridging the videographic plot to another pre-existing and well-known story (Kristeva, 1986), which enriches a videography's associations and meanings beyond its film. Verisimilitude, meaning 'like the truth' or 'lifelike' (Bruner, 1986, p. 16), makes stories more believable.

At the informant level, we did not temporally embed our videography heavily. Except for a few main characters, for whom viewers may observe temporality, we comply with

established interpretive standards (Spiggle, 1994) and present our data aggregated per codes, categories, and themes. Yet causal nexuses are clearly present at the thematization level, where the distinct signposted film chapters are organized in a logical sequence (i.e., from story definition to its ultimate effects on story-receivers). As per spatial embeddedness, we diffusely document the physical context in which we filmed our interviewees (i.e., St Pancras International, London) to boost expressivity (Hietanen et al., 2014). Though a few informants spontaneously connect their stories with others (e.g., Dickens, 1850; Elton, 2012), we do not particularly use intertextuality. Instead, our videography displays considerable verisimilitude, which should further increase viewers' suspended reality (Bilandzic & Busselle, 2008) and narrative transportation (Green & Brock, 2002). To be effective, we argue that videography should use temporal and spatial embedding. Though potentially useful, we believe that intertextuality is not mandatory, as videography can rely on its own text. Contrarily, verisimilitude is the pre-condition that distinguishes academic videography from entertainment films. Unlike entertainment films, videography should illuminate consumers' lives and potentially transform social relations (Hietanen et al., 2014).

With regard to verisimilitude, we reiterate a critique based on Stern's (1997) work. She argues that all storytellers express dominance in accordance with the position they hold, which grant them the power to determine what a story will and will not mention. For example, our film broadcasts the different voices of a dozen women and a dozen men who travelled from ten different countries and whose age ranged from 19 to 80 years. Though methodologically rigorous, it inevitably excludes 31 redundant interviewees representing four additional nationalities. In addition, to a certain extent a story always contains some invented elements (Appel & Richter, 2007), which move it away from objective reality (Eco, 1994). Therefore, a storyteller's dominant position inevitably leads to edits that risk fetishizing or deceiving (Ludwig, van Laer, de Ruyter, & Friedman, 2016). This seems particularly the case

for commercial videography, which tells consumers "true fictions and/or fictionalized truths" (Grayson, 1997, p. 68). Thompson and Tian (2008) document how commercial films are constructed and their role in the construction of collective memories. They uncover the recursive processes through which commercial films draw from collective (counter) memories while contributing to the constant revision of these memories.

Climax

Greek philosophers argued that storytellers build different narrative genres using different *crescendos.* For example, Aristotle (335BC/1998) separates comedy and tragedy under the premise that obstacles in narratives are, or are not, surmountable. Climax is the emotional and narrative construction leading to a key turning point, which may result from deploying different narrative genres rhetorically (Stern, 1995). Cultural references to climax construction also emerge from narrative genres (Genette, 1980) as well as myths (Lévi-Strauss, 1979; Stern, 1995).

Consumer psychologists maintain that genre can affect narrative transportation (Gergen & Gergen, 1988; Van Laer et al., 2014; Van Laer, Escalas, Ludwig, & van den Hende, 2017). McCloskey (1994) underscores crescendos' transporting effect as necessary to storytellers' peroration. Philologist Bertelsen (2011) similarly credits climax's narrative transportation effect, which provides narratives with arrhythmic, irregular cadence. Thus, narratives are more effective when built on a crescendo, which derives from the obstacles that characters encounter at some plot point or from the emotional modulation (e.g., weaker/stronger, positive/negative) they feel as narratives unravel.

To capture climax, we use three drivers. First, we modulate sounds by using (1) a judiciously selected soundtrack, whose internal *crescendos* support the videography's narrative rhythm and whose composer—Antonín Dvořák, a passionate traveller and early

adopter of symphonic poems—incidentally provides our film with some intertextuality; (2) volume; and (3) an alternation between silence and dialogue. Second, climax emerges by opposing uncertainty expressed at the outset (informants' own definitions of narrative; 00:48–03:21) and a summarising end (19:24–20:22). Third, the film itself deals with problems narratives help overcome. As such, disseminated throughout are obstacles and practical solutions that viewers can repeatedly spot and imagine.

Key takeaway or moral

Carlson (2009) stresses that the moral is the story. From a philosophical perspective, Singer and Singer (2005) show that literary sources provide helpful resources to cope with mundane moral issues and dilemmas, thanks to the moral they contain. In consumer research, Stern (1995) uses narratives' outcomes to qualify their genres. Van Laer et al. (2014) further comment on the foundational nature of a narrative's key takeaway and identify its source in the transition from an initial state to a later state or outcome (Bennett & Royle, 2004). Notably, the moral does not necessarily comprise narrated obstacle resolution, as this would depend on the specific narrative genre. As per videography, both expressive (Hietanen et al., 2014) and representational (Schembri & Boyle, 2013) positions converge on the necessity to learn something from a videography—the consumer insight the videography aims to convey—either by exerting a transformative effect on the investigated phenomenon or by documenting it through visual text, respectively.

We detect five main ways videographers can emphasise narratives' morals. First, thematization organises videographic content preliminarily and helps streamline viewers' interpretation. We contend that representational videography should privilege thematization more than expressive videography, because the former stands from a social constructivist position imbued with scientific realism (Hietanen et al., 2014). For example, we use black

frames with text that signpost where the film is going and summarize its chapters' meanings throughout.

Second, a film may include a voice-over, which distils key takeaways along the videographic path. Some videographers may prefer such narration. In our film, however, we purposefully did not use voice-over because of its marked representational nature.

Third, videographers can combine voice-over with on-screen text. In this case, we suggest either using black frames with short keywords to anchor the takeaways while playing a voice-over that speaks in full sentences or interspersing text with narration. Reading and hearing similar sentences simultaneously can cause viewers to feel confused (Ginns, 2005).

Fourth, the ending is useful in summarising ideas. For example, our film intentionally ends with a summarising technique using specific informants and overwritten text. This technique is especially effective as part of a problem-solution structure that expresses uncertainty at the outset.

Fifth, videographers can use a metaphor to increase story persuasiveness (McQuarrie & Mick, 1996, 1999). For example, we use geographical transportation as a metaphor for narrative transportation because we interviewed informants in a transitory space and the audience views the film through their eyes: arriving at the station, waiting to board, and boarding the train.

Contributions to videography from the combined emic and etic planes

Representation issues in consumer research are all but new, especially in ethnographic research. Van Maanen (1988) comments on different ethnographic accounts, including 'realism' (i.e., facts' clinical presentation), 'impressionism' (i.e., rigorous storytelling where

facts are combined with emotional evidence from the field), and 'confessional writing' (i.e., an ethnographer's first-person account). Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) further recommend separating the 'ethnographic account' (i.e., a field's comprehensive description) from the 'theoretical account' (i.e., a researcher's conclusions). Yet Stern (1998) may be an unparalleled reference on how to represent consumers. In Stern's book, Spiggle (1998) observes that while data analysis and interpretation advice abounds, guidance on writing, narrative creation, and theoretical framing is limited. Conversely, Hammersly (1998) provides a full-thought analysis to support ethnographic accounts' readers. To him, reading depends on readers' ability to understand the content ethnographers want to communicate, their motivations, and the technical quality of the ethnographic account.

Our commentary and film bring the viewer's emic and the videographer's etic perspective together within videography's precincts. We provide two main contributions. First, we extend Levy's (2006) conceptualisation by identifying five main needs for which narrative viewers may be looking when consuming videography. We argue that a videography that satisfies these needs, will transports viewers and thus be more effective. Second, we highlight four main story elements videographers can use in their films' creation to favour an audience's narrative transportation. Table 1 summarizes key recommendations we offer videographers to boost a videography's effectiveness while respecting its methodological rigour. To date, methodological contributions to videography mainly deal with its definition and qualification (Belk & Kozinets, 2005; De Valck, Rokka, & Hietanen, 2009), technical aspects and applications (Belk & Kozinets, 2017), and specific aims (Hietanen et al., 2014; Schembri & Boyle, 2013). Combining emic and etic views on videography, our commentary and film advance the field by adding methodological discussion and practical guidance on videography's narrative structure and effectiveness.

Table 1. Recommendations to increase videography's effectiveness

Need for narrative	Recommendations
	• Identify what key narrative needs videography may satisfy and for whom
Narrative elements	**Recommendations**
Imaginable plot	• Consider that temporal embedding should comply with informants and thematization • Film the plot's context and use the footage to spatially embed the videography • Consider bridging the text to more established texts to convey additional meanings • Test the plot for lifelikeness (verisimilitude) • Monitor videographer's dominance to limit risk of fetishizing
Climax	• Identify which narrative elements need to be emphasised through crescendos or uncertain outset and summarising end • Select which tools to use to emphasise key events (e.g., music, volume, alternation sound/silence) • Identify key obstacles that characters face and establish extent to which they are surmountable
Key takeaway	• For representational videography, ensure multiple takeaways portray the various actors' viewpoints • For expressive videography, ensure a focalized moral to support desired transformative effects • Introspect about the extent to which the takeaway(s)/moral bias interpretation and representation of data

4,133 words

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